## GUIDANCE NOTE 1. PROJECT RESULTS FRAMEWORK AND THEORY OF CHANGE

The purpose of this guidance note is to strengthen the ability of GGF staff to ensure projects have good quality, appropriate Theories of Change and Results Frameworks that lead to more and better impact.[[1]](#footnote-1) The note should be read in conjunction with guidance note 2 on indicators, guidance note 3 on GESI and guidance note 4 on Value for Money. For further guidance on how to develop a Theory of Change or Results Framework, please refer to resources listed under section 5 below.

1. Definition of Key Terms

A **Theory of Change** (ToC) describes how change is expected to come about through a project intervention in a specific context. It applies critical thinking to the design, implementation and evaluation of GGF initiatives and projects intended to support change[[2]](#footnote-2) and is based on available evidence such as political economy analysis, gender analysis and evaluations. The ToC shows a hierarchy of results with the causal pathways between them; that is, what action leads to what short and long-term change. There is a ToC for the GGF as a whole, for each country within the Fund and for many projects, particularly large ones. It is usually shown in a diagram with arrows and loops indicating relationships, summarising how change is expected to happen, with an accompanying narrative describing the pathways of change.

A good ToC will help form the basis for developing a **Results Framework** (RF). This is a tool that can also be used to show how change is expected to happen, to set out the main deliverables of the project and is used to plan for, and monitor, results. The RF splits the process of change into more specific steps, usually showing three levels: impact, outcome and outputs. Indicators of change are included, and targets that show how much change will occur by what date (see guidance note 2). The investment of time and effort in the RF should reflect the size and complexity of the programme. One common type of RF is a logical framework which uses a table to show the results and relationships, the assumptions, and indicators and targets[[3]](#footnote-3).

2. TOC AND RESULTS FRAMEWORK AT PROJECT DESIGN STAGE

2.1 Theory of Change

A concise ToC – consisting of a few descriptive paragraphs - should be a component of each project proposal, with more detail, analysis and a diagram for bigger projects. The following key elements of ToC are required in all project proposals:

**i) A clearly articulated narrative showing how the project expects to deliver improved governance and/or economic reform outcomes**

The project should describe how change is assumed to come about as a result of intervention in that specific context. Good project design will map out **causal pathways** from project interventions to the delivery of change. Causal pathways (also referred to as change pathways) show the cause and effect of an action or a change. In effect, it describes what you expect to happen: "X leads to Y which leads to Z, and so on, and so on... For example, if we train parliamentarians on good practice in consulting with constituents, it should lead to MPs consulting more and better with citizens and so, in the long-term, more appropriate services being provided to them.

**ii) Key assumptions**

Because social and economic change is complex, ‘X leads to Y’ is usually accompanied by ‘if a, b and c are in place’. Theories of Change make it clear that causal pathways rest on a set of assumptions about how change might take place in the context. So, in the example above, MPs need to be motivated to act on the training, there need to be mechanisms in place to enable consultation (local surgeries, Facebook and twitter for example). These assumptions are frequently really important to success, but often hidden. A good search for evidence plus a thorough discussion with informed and experienced stakeholders will help to bring this vital understanding to the surface so that it can be included as assumptions in the ToC.

Assumptions can relate to:

* Causality (‘X leads to Y’): The way(s) in which change is expected to happen
* Implementation: How an intervention will be undertaken, and the role of partners and stakeholders involved
* Context: External factors that may influence or have some bearing on the intervention

**Questions to consider when assessing ToCs**

To help quality assure the ToC narrative in a project proposal, GGF staff and partners may consider the following questions:

* Is the ToC based on an analysis of the problem, context, stakeholders, and situation, including with regards to gender inequality and social exclusion?
* Does the ToC clearly set out the longer-term goal? Is the link with the GGF Country level ToC clear? Is it clear how the project will contribute to delivering change for people, how citizens will benefit?
* Does the ToC make sense, respond to the analysis of the context, the problem being addressed, and the changes needed? Is it clear what needs to change and how the project proposes to make these changes? (i.e. does the narrative highlight and describe the overall logic, the key hypotheses the project is based on? Is there a clear rationale behind the proposed interventions and why these are the best ones to achieve the intended outcomes?)
* Does the ToC show what is particular to this project? (avoids the generic). Is it clear why the GGF should be involved – the added value provided?
* Does it adequately consider the main political enablers and barriers to the success of the project? Does it adequately consider the role of external actors/factors?
* Are the causal pathways clear and plausible, including intermediate changes, and no missing links? Are there no large leaps of faith/gaps in the logic?
* Are assumptions about the causal links and about the context made explicit? Are assumptions realistic?
* Is reference made to relevant evidence (e.g. evaluations, lessons learned, research) that underpin assumed change processes/ causal pathways and key assumptions, or alternatively – is the lack of evidence noted? (evidence gaps should be filled during the inception phase and/or carefully monitored throughout implementation).

2.2 Results Framework

The ToC forms the basis of a Results Framework (RF). Whilst a ToC gives sight of the ‘bigger picture’, the RF zooms in on what the project is going to achieve, and how progress will be measured. There should be clear read-across between a project’s ToC and its results framework, although there is no need to include everything set out in the ToC. The RF is the main tool for monitoring the progress of a project and its achievements.

There is no single correct format. An example of a RF, in a logframe format, is given at the end of this document. Whatever the chosen format, a results framework consists of the following elements:

* **Results chain**
* Indicators
* Baselines, milestones and targets
* Data sources
* **Assumptions**

Results chain and assumptions are discussed in this guidance note, while the other components are covered in Annex 2 (Indicators).

**Note**: Some frameworks show further details, including activities and even inputs. This may be part of the process of project design for the Implementing Partner, and outlined in the project proposal, but it is less useful for GGF monitoring. Spending lots of time and effort monitoring activities and detailed workplans is unproductive. If the RF is well designed, it is more efficient and effective to focus on whether outputs are being achieved and targets met, without getting involved in the details of exactly how that is achieved, other than to ensure compliance.

**i) Results chain**

The results chain links the intervention’s intended results to the proposed solution (the project intervention and activities) as outlined in the theory of change.

**Results** are statements of the future state the project is contributing to. For example; *MPs are driven by constituents’ concerns*; *the legislation under consideration reflects citizens’ needs*. They focus on the ‘what’ needs to be in place to contribute to impact rather than ‘how’ that will be achieved. Achievement of these results is then measured by indicators.

The diagram below shows how the inputs a project uses are converted through activities into outputs, for which the project can be held accountable. Over time, and with the contribution from other stakeholders, and with assumptions holding, those outputs will contribute to outcomes and eventually, impact. The ToC and RFs focus more on the impact, outcomes and outputs, where and how the change will happen.



Source: DFID Logical Frameworks Smart Guide

IMPACT: The positive (or negative), primary and secondary long-term effects that an intervention contributes to, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. Adapted from OECD, 2002 (p.24)

Impacts describe higher-level objectives to which the project aims to contribute, alongside other actors and factors. For example, in relation to reduced corruption, governments being more accountable and responsive to citizens, increased citizen trust, and greater economic opportunities. In most settings the intervention of a single actor will not, on its own, achieve the intended change at impact level. When defining change at the impact level it is important to consider where the intervention sits in relation to that of others (other HMG interventions and those of external national and international actors).

**Questions to consider** when reviewing **impact statements**:

* Does the impact statement reflect the problem statement – the problem that the project is trying to address?
* Is the link with the Country level ToC clear (The implementing partner may wish to use a outcome statement from the country GGF ToC to inform their impact statement)

OUTCOMES are the effects or behaviour changes resulting from projects outputs (e.g. doing things differently, changes in performance)

All projects should have a project outcome that is achievable within the lifetime of the project (bigger projects may have multiple outcomes, not exceeding 3). An outcome is a change which the project contributes to but which is not within the full control of the implementing partner. However, if assumptions hold true, there should be a good chance of achieving the outcome.

Outcomes are often defined in terms of *behaviour changes* among individuals, groups, institutions or organisations. When defining change at outcome level, ask “who needs to do what differently?” It is helpful to consider behaviour change as a function of an actor’s capacity, motivation and opportunity to change, and to think about how, where and why the planned intervention can support change in these areas.

Outcome level changes may be sequential, with one as a pre-condition for the next, or non-linear. Defining ***intermediate outcomes*** can be helpful to unpack thinking on the process of change and to demonstrate progress. Similarly, it is useful to define ***longer-term outcomes*** that the project contributes to. This will support monitoring & evaluation activities after the project has ended (e.g. project outcome assessments).

Outcomes should be at an appropriate level of ambition, taking into consideration the context, baseline situation and trends, as well as length and scale of the project’s interventions. Large projects with multiple interventions will often have outcomes which are far more ambitious than those for a smaller, shorter intervention. To help define realistic results it is useful to think in terms of the ***level of control*** that is possible through an intervention/ that an Implementing Partner has over an intended change.

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Source: McConnell (2019) Adapted from Montague et al. (2003)

For all projects, consideration should be given to whether there is a potential outcome related to further investment in reform. This may relate to a commitment of the national government, or to the scope for attracting other external funds, e.g. in relation to EU Accession (guidance to be elaborated).

**Questions to consider** when reviewing **outcomes:**

* Are outcomes clear, precise and straightforward? Does it make clear what change the project intends to occasion, and for who, and how the project will address obstacles to reform?
* Is the project outcome(s) achievable within the life time of the project (if stated assumptions hold true, and there are no major deteriorations in the context)?
* Is the outcome(s) pitched at an appropriate level of ambition? (e.g. is it not an output).
* Are intermediate outcomes (short- and medium-term) specified as relevant? Can (short and medium-term) outcomes realistically be achieved on the basis of delivery of outputs?
* Is it clear how outcome level change will contribute to the defined longer-term goal and intended impact? Are longer term outcomes specified to support monitoring & evaluation activities after the project has intended?
* Are outcomes measurable? (i.e. will it be possible to identify suitable indicators?)
* Are expected dates by when outcomes can realistically be achieved stated? (e.g. upon project completion, and number of months / years after project completion).

An output is a deliverable within the direct control of the implementing partner. Examples of outputs are: skills/capacity developed, specific guidance delivered and accepted, processes/procedures simplified. Outputs will lead to the delivery of outcomes if the stated assumptions hold.

OUTPUTS: the tangible products, goods and services which result from an intervention’s inputs and activities.

Adapted from OCED, 2002 (p.28); Bamberger et al (2012).

**Questions to consider** when reviewing **outputs:**

* Do the output statements reflect the specific, direct deliverables of the project? (rather than provide a description of activities)
* Do outputs provide the conditions necessary to achieve the outcomes?
* Are defined outputs clearly able to be delivered by the project based on the project’s defined activities and the proposed inputs?
* Are output statement clearly defined as outputs, rather than assumptions

The results framework should record **critical assumptions** (in some cases these may be stated elsewhere in the project document). Critical assumptions are those that must hold true to realise the result.

For each output and outcome, critical assumptions related to external factors that could carry risk should be noted (for example, political environment, economy, conflict, etc.). Assumptions can also relate to the role of partners and stakeholders involved in the project, as well the removal of barriers to ensure marginalised groups can benefit from the project. Assumptions need to hold true to move up the results chain from activities, to outputs, outcomes and impact.

* IF we undertake the activities AND the assumptions hold true, THEN we will deliver the outputs
* IF we deliver the outputs AND the assumptions hold true, THEN we will achieve the outcome
* IF we achieve the outcome(s) AND the assumptions hold true, THEN we will contribute to the impact

If there are many assumptions that we are not sure will hold true, or a particular ‘killer assumption’ (i.e. an assumption on which much depends), it is less likely that the project will deliver the planned results and the project may need to be redesigned (e.g. by adding activities or components). In case assumptions have the potential to derail the project if they do not hold true, then they should be stated as a risk and monitored. Assumptions and risks need to be monitored regularly.

**Questions to consider** when reviewing **assumptions:**

* Are assumptions comprehensive or are any critical assumptions missing?
* Are the assumptions realistic? (if assumptions are unlikely to hold true, we should reconsider the project and/or its design)
	1. Limitations of ToCs and RFs

There are several criticisms of results frameworks. The main one is the implicit assumption of linear progress, that is, that one or more actions (or activities) will inevitably lead to certain outputs contributing to certain outcomes, and ultimately the overarching goal. Governance assistance can aim at certain outputs and outcomes, but the enormous number of political variables at work may mean that certain activities won’t work at all or not in the way that was originally envisaged. In short, progress is likely to be difficult, haphazard and messy.

In response to changes in political – and other – variables, activities will need to change. Implementing partners will therefore need support from the GGF to enable adjustment of the activities, while keeping focused on the over-arching goal.

Both ToCs and RFs have the benefit of giving a coherent overview,articulating how all aspects contribute towards change. The process of compiling and revising the ToC/RF challengesus to reflect, explore and analysehow change happens. Studying evidenceand assumptionsfurther challenges our beliefs, misconceptions, knowledge to inform more considered strategic choices to maximise effectiveness. Both tools are also important for learning, giving focus to reflection and revision, updating the documents to reflect the latest situation.

5. SOURCES OF FURTHER GUIDANCE

Accessible introduction to Theories of Change and how to compile them <http://www.globaltfokus.dk/images/Pulje/Arkiv/Fagligt_Fokus/Fagligt_Fokus_-_Inspirational_Guide_-_Theory_of_Change.pdf>

2012 review of the use of the ToC as a tool: advantages and disadvantages <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a5ded915d3cfd00071a/DFID_ToC_Review_VogelV7.pdf>

Relevant guidance produced for the CSSF overall: CSSF Programme management guidance

Comprehensive guide to ToC and guidelines on how to compile one <https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/organisational_theory_of_change_bond_10.pdf>

DFID guidance from 2011 on logframes <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/253889/using-revised-logical-framework-external.pdf>

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| --- | --- |
| **PROJECT TITLE** |  |
|
| **IMPACT** | **Impact Indicator 1** |  | **Baseline** | **Milestone 1** | **Milestone 2** | **Milestone 3** | **Target**  |  |
|  |  | **Planned** |  |   |   |   |  |
| **Achieved** |   |   |   |   |   |
|  |   | **Source** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Outcome 1** | **Outcome Indicator 1.1** |  | **Baseline** | **Milestone 1** | **Milestone 2** | **Milestone 3** | **Target**  | **Assumptions** |
|  |  | **Planned** |  |  |  |  |  | .  |
| **Achieved** |   |   |   |   |   |
|   | **Source** |
|  |
| **Outcome Indicator 1.2** |  | **Baseline** | **Milestone 1** | **Milestone 2** | **Milestone 3** | **Target**  |
|  | **Planned** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Achieved** |   |   |   |   |   |
|   | **Source** |
|  |
| **OUTPUT 1** | **Output Indicator 1.1** |  | **Baseline**  | **Milestone 1** | **Milestone 2** | **Milestone 3** | **Target**  | **Assumptions** |
|  |  | **Planned** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Achieved** |   |   |   |   |   |
| **Source** |
| IOM |
| **Output Indicator 1.2** |  | **Baseline**  | **Milestone 1** | **Milestone 2** | **Milestone 3** | **Target**  |
|  | **Planned** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Achieved** |   |  |  |  |   |

1. This Annex draws on guidance produced by DFID and the Stabilisation Unit (insert link once available) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a5ded915d3cfd00071a/DFID\_ToC\_Review\_VogelV7.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For more information on the logframe specifically, see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/253889/using-revised-logical-framework-external.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)